Youth Unstoppable: The Rise of the Global Youth Climate Movement

2018 • 86 minutes • Directed by Slater Jewell-Kemker • Distributed by Game Theory Films

Youth Unstoppable takes us inside the rise of the global youth climate movement. Slater Jewell-Kemker was just 15 when she began documenting the untold stories of youth on the front lines of climate change who are refusing to let their futures slip away. Over the course of 12 years and set against striking visuals of a planet in crisis, Youth Unstoppable follows the evolution of a diverse network of youth rising up to shape the world they will live in.

If time is short, a selection of three excerpts with a combined length of 25 minutes may be viewed instead. See page 9.
WHY I SELECTED THIS FILM

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SUGGESTED SUBJECT AREAS

Behavioral Sciences  Medicine
Economics  Meteorology
Engineering  Political Science
Environmental Justice  Social Anthropology
Environmental Science  Social Policy Studies
Geology  Sustainability Studies
Global Health

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOCUS

Climate justice is environmental justice. Youth Unstoppable spotlights the role that youth activism plays in pressing global leaders for climate ambition and climate justice. Filmmaker Slater Jewell-Kemker was 15 when she began documenting the little-known story of youth—including herself—who were joining the global youth climate movement and turning up in growing numbers at global conferences, demanding action on climate change to avert the unjust and unnecessary catastrophes that scientists have been predicting for decades.
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KEY LOCATIONS

Los Angeles, California  Copenhagen, Denmark
Catalina Island, California  Cancún, Mexico
Washington, D.C.  Kathmandu and villages in Nepal
Ontario, Canada  Paris, France
Alberta, Canada  Katowice, Poland
Kobe, Japan

PEOPLE FEATURED

Conference delegates and members of climate change organizations in order of appearance

Abrar Anwar – Bangladesh youth delegate
Ben Wessel, Kyle Gracey, and Marcie Hawkins – SustainUS
Daniel T'seleie – Canadian Youth Coalition
Christopher Baan – World Student Community for Sustainable Development
Alex Doukas and Meaghan McKeen – Canadian Youth Climate Coalition
Tim Harris – Climate Camp UK
Emily Hunter – Greenpeace International
Iain Keith – global campaigner, Avaaz.org
Prince Papa Omugataya – African Youth Climate Coalition
Danny Hutley – UK Youth Climate Coalition
Melina Laboucan-Massimo – Indigenous Environmental Network
Anna Oposa – youth activist, Philippines
Jeremy Osborn and Kelly Blynn – co-founders, 350.org
Alina Pokhrel – Nepalese Youth Climate Action
Marcie Smith – SustainUS youth delegate
Greta Thunberg – Fridays for Future
Martín Vainstein – Young Friends of the Earth Europe
Julian Vélez Alvarez – Earth in Brackets
Xiuhtezcatl Martinez – Earth Guardians
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LONG VERSION

SYNOPSIS OF THE SEQUENCES FOR THE 86-MINUTE FILM

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Becoming an environmental activist (00:35)

Slater Jewell-Kemker was born in 1992—the same year world leaders first gathered in Rio de Janeiro to discuss climate change and sustainable development. Severn Cullis-Suzuki, from the Environmental Children’s Organization, addressed the conference and demanded that the rights of youth be taken into consideration.

Born to filmmaker parents, Slater believed that stories could change the world, and so she started filming at age 15. As the Arctic began to warm and droughts, fires, and storms intensified, she began to take part in the “unstoppable” global environmental youth movement.

An environmental education (04:25)

In 2005 Slater met and interviewed marine biologist Jean-Michel Cousteau. He inspired her with his description of the interconnectedness of all living beings in the natural world and his belief that the young can teach the adults. On the family farm in Canada, at age 12, Slater began to pay attention to climate change.

Going global (07:56)

At age 15, Slater was one of two youth delegates to represent Canada at an environmental conference in Kobe, Japan. There she met youth from all over the world and became increasingly concerned about the impact of climate change and extreme weather in the home countries of her new friends.

COP 15 and greenwashing (15:30)

In 2009 Slater attended the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference (COP 15) and met activists Ben Wessel and Kyle Gracey from SustainUS, who are focused on youth engagement and climate action. Outside the main conference, youth delegates from all over the world were coming to understand the impact of the climate crisis. The lack of commitment to specific goals felt like “greenwashing”—a betrayal to activists. Demonstrations became violent.

“We are the only species on the planet that has the capability and the privilege to decide not to disappear.”

Jean-Michel Cousteau, biologist
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COP 16: Building trust (27:00)
The thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 16) took place in 2010 in Cancun, Mexico. Youth activists focused on mobilizing change. There is a feeling of resilience and solidarity. Slater records demonstrations by indigenous peoples, who are deeply impacted by environmental degradation, climate change, and rising sea levels. Major cities like Rio, Miami, and Shanghai could disappear. Island nations demand a ceiling of 1.5°C. Youth are excluded from the discussions.

Visiting Nepal (40:40)
Slater visits her friend Alina in Nepal, which is also being affected by climate change. Erratic monsoons in some regions have left farmers’ fields drowned or parched. No food crops can be planted. Alina and local activists work at the grassroots level, helping to rebuild and repair farms and roads following the extreme weather events. Slater returns to her family farm in Canada more acutely aware of the seasons, and she enrolls in film school.

COP 18: Relying on fossil fuels (53:55)
United Nations meetings in Poland and Doha, Qatar, seem far removed from floods, fires, heat domes, and hurricanes. As Canada withdraws from the Kyoto Protocol, unable to meet its emissions target, Slater examines Canada’s and her family’s reliance on fossil fuels and the oil industry, and the impact of the oil sands on the indigenous communities that live near Alberta’s oil sands.

Paris beckons (1:00:48)
Slater heads for a global gathering in Paris (COP 21), where clean energy has become mainstream. The global youth climate movement has grown confident that they could have a powerful impact. Demonstrations demand a fair, ambitious, and binding deal. An unprecedented pact is reached to cut carbon emissions. This would not have been possible without the unrelenting efforts of the climate movement.
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People’s Climate March (1:11:00)

In June 2017, President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the Paris Agreement just as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released an alarming report on the dangers of exceeding the target of a 1.5°C rise. But even to reach that goal will require unprecedented changes, including eliminating greenhouse gases entirely by 2050.

Slater returns to her farm and introduces sustainable practices. She rejoins her friends at the People’s Climate March in D.C. The youth movement is older and more confident. Slater meets Jean-Michel Cousteau again at the march, bringing her full circle. Members of the global youth climate movement continue their work at home.

Another world is possible (1:20:20)

In Poland, Slater meets Greta Thunberg. Youth walk out of schools to demonstrate for climate action. The seeds sown by the youth movement have grown into a network of movements around the world. A new generation of young politicians, such as U.S. representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, are making climate change a mainstream issue. The United States rejoin the Paris Agreement. Young people are optimistic that a just, caring, and sustainable world is possible.

Credits (1:24:05)

“Change is coming whether you like it or not.”

Greta Thunberg, organizer of Fridays for Future
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who are some of the people who inspired Slater in her early years as a filmmaker? (01:12–02:21, 03:22–05:50)
2. What is significant about Severn Cullis-Suzuki’s speech at the Rio summit? (01:05–02:21)
3. “We are all connected to the ocean.” What does this mean? Why did Jean-Michel Cousteau feel that the young had much to teach the adults? (04:40–05:45)
4. “We are unstoppable.” Discuss the significance of this statement in the context of the global youth climate movement.
5. In Abrar’s view, how has Bangladesh suffered from climate change? (08:55–10:55)
6. Why did Slater feel like she was a “photo-op” kid in Kobe, Japan? (13:20–14:15)
7. What role did the youth delegates play in helping Slater navigate the political processes at COP Denmark and Cancun? (19:00–21:10, 27:06–30:10)
8. What were the youth activists and advocates pushing for? How was it different from the “fluffy” language used by diplomats? (21:18–22:40)
11. How are island nations affected by rising sea levels? (33:50–36:10)
12. Slater’s visit to Nepal deepened her empathy toward people on the front lines of climate change. Discuss. (43:20–52:20)
13. What does bitumen extraction in Alberta’s tar sands involve? How is it impacting neighboring communities? (57:17–1:00:05)
14. Why was the Paris Agreement a remarkable success for the youth? What were the salient aspects of the agreement? (1:04:22–1:06:20, 1:08:50–1:10:52)
15. Was the global youth climate movement a success? What are some of the steps they have taken to keep working on environmental concerns? (1:09:31–1:10:48, 1:14:30–1:14:50)
16. What were some of the sustainable practices that Slater followed in her own life? (1:18:20–1:18:42)
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ACTIVITIES

View Severn Cullis-Suzuki’s complete speech.

Many organizations, such as SustainUS, 350.org, Greenpeace, and Youngo Council, participated in the global youth climate movement. Read their mission statements. Develop your own.

Read the BBC guide to climate change.

Learn how to talk to a climate skeptic: grist.org/climate/skeptics-2

Read about indigenous environmental movements.

Understand indigenous narratives about the environment.

Learn about indigenous peoples.

View the Youth4Climate series.

Join local climate action groups.

We can’t fall into this narrative of hopelessness and negativity, or we won’t be able to save what is still worth saving.

Slater Jewell-Kemker
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SHORT VERSION
SELECTED EXCERPTS (RUNNING TIME 25 MINUTES)
The original film is 86 minutes in length, including credits. Where time is short, these three excerpts may be viewed instead. Discussion questions and activities related to the excerpts follow below.

Introduction (00:40–05:50)
The first excerpt begins with Slater beginning to record: “Are we good?” and ends with Jean-Michel Cousteau saying, “It’s your job now.”

Slater Jewell-Kemker, born to filmmaker parents, was inspired by young climate activists like Severn Cullis-Suzuki who were calling for a sustainable future. As the environmental crisis intensified through the years, Slater began to document the environmental youth movement. She interviews Jean-Michel Cousteau, who tells her about the interconnectedness of life and nature and says, “It’s your job now” to take care of the earth.

Youth activists and advocates (27:03–40:40)
The second excerpt begins with the graphics for COP Cancun and ends with Slater saying, “We have been shut down.”

In 2016, at COP 13 in Cancun, Mexico, youth activists from SustainUS, 350.org, and UK Youth Climate Coalition focus on mobilizing change. As they navigate the political process and find allies, each delegate has a vision for an equitable future where energy does not come from fossil fuel and where there are green jobs, clean air, and clean water. The delegates also demand a ceiling of 1.5°C as a limit to global warming. Even though in Cancun the youth were left out of negotiations, Slater felt that the youth activists were more connected than before. There was solidarity and resilience.

Another world is possible (1:16:00–1:24:00)
The third excerpt begins with “People had come to D.C....” and ends with Slater saying, “Another world is possible.”

The United States, under the Trump administration, withdraws from the Paris Agreement. Protests erupt. Slater and her friends from the global youth climate movement march in Washington, D.C. Slater meets Swedish activist Greta Thunberg. Inspired by Thunberg’s Fridays for Future movement, youth in many countries walk out of schools to demonstrate for climate action.

The seeds sown by the youth movement have grown into a global network. A new generation of young politicians, such as U.S. representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, are making climate change a mainstream issue. The United States rejoins the Paris Agreement. Young people are optimistic that a just, caring, and sustainable world is possible.
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE SELECTED EXCERPTS

1. How is Slater Jewell-Kemker able to use her filmmaking skills to express her environmental activism?

2. The youth participating in conferences and marches express diverse ideas and beliefs about what is at stake and what needs to be done. Are some of their ideas or activities similar to yours? Describe how similar or different their work is from yours. (27:03–40:27)

3. Swedish youth activist Greta Thunberg has inspired young and old. Is there a person in your community who has exceptional leadership skills and inspires climate change activism? Discuss.

4. How can lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic be used to understand and manage the environmental crisis?

5. Why does Slater say “Another world is possible?”

ACTIVITIES

Watch a 4 minute interview with Slater on Global Citizen.
Discuss climate anxiety and view an interview with Slater.
What climate change issue are you most passionate about? What are your next steps?
Review your local government’s (county, province, or state) environmental agenda.
Locate a country on the world map. Read about the climate change issues faced by that country. Reach out to local activists and organizations online.

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

What is COP?
Highlights and decisions of COP 26
Egypt’s goals for COP 27
British Council offering: Learning for a Sustainable Future
Explore the GCA Youth Adaptation Summit
Intern for 3–6 months with the United Nations Climate Change UNFCCC secretariat